




I'm Sorry

Today's nonprofits face greater transparency than ever before, and apologies are often necessary to maintain accountability. Compelling leaders understand there's strength and integrity, not weakness, in humility.

As John Kador explains in *In Effective Apology* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, www.bkconnection.com), an apology restores dignity to the party that was hurt and shows we're willing to sacrifice for a relationship we damaged. It benefits the offender as much as the victim and is an important way to build trust, reduce litigation, and deepen relationships. It's part of functioning in a connected world. Life becomes richer in the process.

Even more than being judged by our shortcomings, we're measured by our response to making mistakes. In a world where little stays hidden for long, responding to mistakes with an apology that shows we have nothing to hide demonstrates authentic leadership. 

—reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

Anything less than a wholehearted apology can deepen the damage.

How to Make Sure Your Apology Is Effective

- **Be specific** about what you did and whom you hurt.
- **Begin your apology** with the word “I.” Use active rather than passive voice (“I’m sorry that I misunderstood” rather than “I regret that this misunderstanding happened.”)
- **Offer restitution**—a concrete act that will help restore the relationship to what it was before the offense.
- **Take responsibility** for your behavior, and express remorse.
- **Include a promise** that you won’t repeat the offense.
- **Make the apology in person** if you can. If that’s impossible, a phone call followed by a letter is often the best alternative. If you must use e-mail, follow up as soon as possible with an in-person, phone, or letter apology.
- **Practice your apology**, writing it down and going over it aloud a few times before delivering it.




The Nudge Factor: How to Help People Overcome Biases in Making Decisions

A nudge is anything that significantly alters behavior, according to Richard H. Taler and Cass R. Sunstein in *Nudge*. Because people are so busy and face so many complex choices every day, they need such nudges to move them in the right direction. Here are a few common decision-making mistakes and some ways you can help nudge people toward better choices.

The planning fallacy is the tendency toward too much optimism about the time it takes to complete activities. When you’re taking the lead on a project, always give people a deadline several weeks ahead of the real deadline, or you’ll never be done on time.

Status-quo bias refers to people’s inclination to stick with their current situation rather than make a change—what the authors of *Nudge* call the “yeah, whatever” heuristic. If you want people to change, you need to make it clear how the new reality will benefit them and how much better it will be than the status quo.

The availability heuristic is what people use in assessing risk. If they can easily remember times when something occurred, they think the risk of it happening is greater. This misconception explains why we think the risk of employees stealing from us is small. Since few nonprofits prosecute employee theft or make it public, the risk is far greater than we believe. You can help people reassess such risks by reminding them that these things do happen, nudging judgments back in the direction of true probabilities, and making sure they take precautions for crises that are preventable.

Prejudgment mistakes are current judgments made on the basis of previous experience or what someone has told us in the past. When faced with a situation that looks familiar, we’ll leap to the judgment made in the previous case, even if there are important differences. Help people counter this form of biased thinking by advising them to seek the input of others, collect more data, or just be aware of the potential for this kind of decision-making error so they can guard against it. 

—Sources: *Nudge* (Yale University Press, www.yale.edu/yup, and Penguin Press, www.penguin.com) and *Think Again* (Harvard Business Press, www.harvardbusiness.com)

Beware of the “yeah, whatever” heuristic.



How to Turn a Raw Idea into Brilliant Success

Getting an idea is just the first step. After your first flash of insight, here's how to turn it into something useful:

Clarify what you want to do with your idea.

Check to be sure the creative task fits with the goals, values, and beliefs of your organization and all those who will help develop the idea.

Explore all possible consequences of your idea, both positive and negative.

Test your idea, making sure it's practical and looking for weaknesses, by asking some carefully selected people for their input.

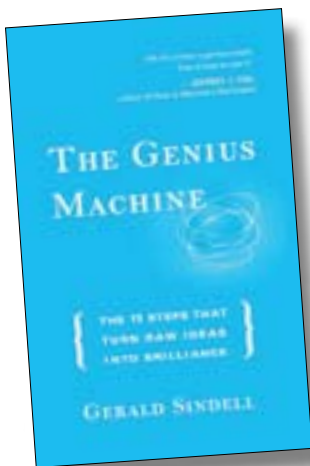
Research to see where you fit in the evolution of ideas similar to yours. Notice what makes your idea different from all the others.

Consider all the people who might benefit from your idea, both inside and outside your organization and your community.

Make it easy for people to adopt your new idea. Offer learning resources at every step.

Describe your idea in the precise way you want others to perceive it. Work for its successful introduction, and be your idea's advocate. □

— adapted from *The Genius Machine* (www.newworldlibrary.com)



Improve Your Workplace with Feedback

Sharing constructive advice about work-related behavior can do more than ramp up productivity, as a brisk, rewarding book by Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation (www.harvardbusiness.edu) makes clear. The 96-page paperback, *Giving Feedback*, describes how feedback can improve leadership skills, solve problems, and change behavior.

Giving good feedback requires preparation. Pinpointing the feedback's purpose will help guide it. If you know you're going to be receiving feedback, you can prepare, too, by deciding what you'd like to learn from it.

Feedback avoidance, by giver or receiver, is a problem itself. If feedback is perceived as difficult, it might be avoided until it's too late to be effective.

Feedback can dramatically improve performance and make the workplace more enjoyable and productive. Knowing how to give and receive feedback can make our organizations more effective in achieving our goals. This little book will help us do that. □

— reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

Feedback avoidance is a problem itself.

Tips for Giving Feedback

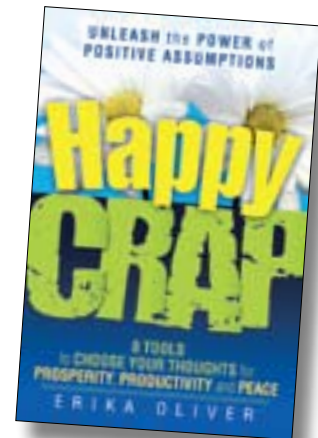
- **Give feedback face to face and as soon as possible** after the situation you're critiquing.
- **Make the feedback specific, objective, and fact-based.** Describe the situation or behavior without judging or criticizing the person's character.
- **Give the other person a chance** to comment. Listen actively to the response.
- **Be supportive and encouraging,** giving suggestions that will help the person grow and change.

Tips for Receiving Feedback

- **Seek out feedback and welcome it** as the gift it is. Use all feedback as a chance to learn something.
- **Accept feedback without arguing,** denying, justifying your position, or reacting emotionally.
- **Don't take it personally.** See it as a way to improve your work, not as an attack on your character.
- **Ask questions to clarify** actions you can take to improve.

Change Your Life with Happy Talk

Since we can choose our thoughts, why not replace damaging self-talk with positive, life-affirming messages—or “happy crap,” as Erika Oliver puts it in her new book *Happy Crap* (www.erikaoliver.com, erika@erikaoliver.com). Take a moment, she advises, to identify the facts of a situation and your assumptions about it. Then replace any assumptions that don't serve you with more productive ones. Making this choice will have positive effects on all aspects of your life. □



Questions for Nonprofit Success

In *More than Just Money* (linkingmissiontomoney.com), Allen J. Proctor offers questions to pave the way for success:

- **Does your spending** reflect your priorities? Can you prove it convincingly?

- **What events** might force you to deviate from delivering on your priorities this year and next?

- **Have you established a process** that will help staff and board spot problems quickly?

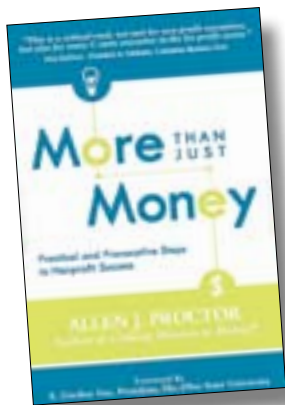
- **What is your action plan** if cash drops below a predetermined level?

- **Do you regularly review community needs** and adapt to meet them?

- **Are all board members active** and involved in leadership activities? Do you provide them with training to be sure they have the knowledge they need? Do they agree on their duties annually?

- **Do you keep donors informed** so that they know their generosity is effective?

- **Do you have a set of goals** to sustain your mission during lean times? ❑



Seven Tips and Exercises to Encourage Mindfulness

Being mindful—paying conscious attention to each moment without judgment—increases self-awareness, relationship-management, and leadership skills. Here are some ways to increase mindfulness in yourself and those around you:

- **When giving someone a task, don't explain** exactly how it should be done. Specific instructions cut off possibilities.

- **List people** who have helped you in your career along with moments with them that had a lasting impact. Use your insights as guidelines in consciously acting to bring out the best in others and develop their potential.

- **Give upper-level leaders the opportunity** to coach others. Coaches often benefit even more than those they coach, opening themselves up to those around them, sharpening their leadership skills, and sparking renewal.

- **Meditate for a half hour or so**, sitting quietly and concentrating on your breathing, letting your thoughts flow in and out of your mind without analysis or commentary. This simple act, practiced regularly, can transform your life, work, and leadership.

- **Next time you're standing in line**, sitting at a red light, or attending a meeting, focus all your attention on the experience, noticing everything and everyone around you.

- **Think of someone with whom you work**, and imagine their day from when they get up to when they go to bed. Then write down what things you noticed that you hadn't known before.

- **Bring in "outsiders"** as often as possible to provide new perspectives and upset the status quo. For example, arrange with another organization to "trade" board members at several meetings. ❑

—adapted from *Wild Chickens and Petty Tyrants: 108 Metaphors for Mindfulness* (Wisdom Publications, www.wisdompubs.org), *Mindfulness* (Addison Wesley Publishing Company, www.pearsonighered.com), *Resonant Leadership* (Harvard Business School Press, www.harvardbusiness.org), and *The Mindful Leader* (Shambhala Publications, Inc. www.shambhala.com)

Survey Probes Nonprofit Diversity

While nonprofit leaders claim to value diversity, they do little to back up that claim, according to nonprofit employees who responded to a recent survey. Key findings:

- Nearly 90% of employees think their organization values diversity. However, more than 70% believe their employer doesn't do enough to create a diverse and inclusive work environment.
- More than 35% of people of color who indicated that they examine diversity during the hiring process report having withdrawn candidacy or declined a job offer due to a perceived lack of diversity and inclusiveness.

The report provides five strategies for organizations to build diversity:

- Hold open conversations about race that include executive leaders.
- Measure results of diversity initiatives.
- Build partnerships and networks that facilitate effective recruiting.
- Cleanse any subtle bias from your hiring process.
- Take time to develop, mentor, and promote a diverse staff.

The full report is available at <http://www.cgcareers.org/diversityreport.pdf>. Also see "Diversity and Inclusion: Why Now?" (Vol. 29, No. 2, www.snpo.org/members). ❑